

An Useful Ministry a Valid One.

BEING A
SERMON

Preach'd at *EXON*,

May the 5th, 1714.

At a Meeting of the

UNITED MINISTERS
OF
Devon and Cornwall.

By *JAMES PEIRCE.*

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AT THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE

Tr. 58 A B E I N G

SERMON

Preached at EXETER

And the 17th

And Meeting of the

UNITED MINISTERS

OF

DEVON AND CORNWALL

BY JAMES STEPHENS

OF THE CHURCH

IN THE CITY

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2 COR. III. 3.

For as much as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ, ministred by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.

THERE are many subtil Devices, whereby the Enemy of Mankind endeavours to hinder the Success of the Gospel. Among others, this is no inconsiderable one: That he encourages Prejudices against the Persons, whom Christ is pleased to send upon this noble Design of turning Sinners from the Evil of their Ways to God. He knows, if he can weaken their Reputation by false Aspersions, or render their Authority suspected by some shew of Objections, they will be little regarded, and he shall be the more secure of his Prey.

THIS Stratagem has been diligently plied of late, but it is a very old one; which however should not be esteem'd the more venerable or worthy of Imitation by those who pretend the greatest Respect for Antiquity. We may trace it as high as Moses's time, who, when *he supposed his Brethren would have understood, how that God by his Hand would deliver them,* and therefore endeavour'd to set two of them at one again who were striving, met with this Repulse from him *that did*

his Neighbour wrong (as such Persons are always the most impertinent and cavilling) *Who made THEE a Ruler and a Judge over us?*

BUT, waving Instances of this Nature under the Old Dispensation, we may easily observe the same Craft has been continually working from the Beginning of the New. The *Priests* and the *Levites* scrupled the Authority of the *Great Forerunner* of our Lord. *Why Baptizest Thou*, say they, *if Thou be not That Christ, nor Elias, neither That Prophet?* But more unreasonable were they, who dealt in the same manner with our Lord himself, pragmatically asking him that Question, which from his Works they might have easily resolved themselves: *By what Authority doest Thou these Things? and who gave Thee this Authority?*

John i. 25.
Matth. xxi. 23.

AND now you have heard the Commission of our Lord was call'd in Question, you may well expect it should afterward be with the Disciples, as it had been before with their Master. The most famous and eminent of them could not escape the like Treatment. We need not wonder at what has happen'd in our Time, if we do but observe, how the Apostle *Paul*, who was inferiour to none in Gifts, Zeal, Diligence or Success, was forc'd to vindicate his Authority to some Christians, who, though they were well acquainted with him, yet gave way too much to the Insinuations of crafty and selfish Men, who had crept in among them, and call'd his Authority in Question, endeavouring upon the ruines of his Reputation to establish their own. It might have been expected, that *He*, if any Man, should have been secur'd from such Usage, not only by the Miracles which constantly attested his *Apostleship*, but by his inoffensive

sensitive Behaviour, who so little sought himself in any of his Labours, and used not to depreciate or contemn the Endeavours of others; nay, who rejoiced in the spreading the Gospel, when those who were Enemies to himself were imploy'd in doing it: Which is a Temper very foreign to many in our Days. Some, says he, *preach Christ Phil. 1. even of Envy and Strife, and some also of Good-will. 15, &c.* The one preach Christ of Contention, not sincerely, supposing to add Affliction to my Bonds: but the other of Love, knowing that I am set for the Defence of the Gospel. What then? notwithstanding every way, whether in Pretence, or in Truth, Christ is Preached; and I therein do Rejoyce, yea, and I will Rejoyce. How reasonably might one of this Temper have expected others should have forborn all Attempts of undervaluing him! But they, who have the best Authority themselves, are observ'd to be ordinarily least noisy and clamorous about the Authority of others.

THE *Corinthians*, to whom this Epistle was sent, were a Church of the Apostle *Paul's* own Planting; with whom he had spent a considerable Time: and yet now in his Absence some arrogant Pretender had rais'd base Prejudices in their Minds against him. This gave him occasion to speak much in his own Vindication in both his Epistles to that Church. He imployes a Variety of Arguments to justify to them his Authority, and, among others, he here makes use of one very likely to convince them, it being drawn from somewhat they felt in their own Breasts; viz. *The Success of his Ministry upon them.*

IN the first Verse of the Chapter he begins very artfully and handsomly to clear himself of an Objection,

jection, which seems to have been made against him upon the account of his Manner of writing in his former Epistle to them. *Do we, says he, begin again to commend our selves?* q. d. ' You greatly mistake, if you imagine it a pleasant Thing to me to be speaking of my self. I should have wholly abstained from every Thing of that Nature in my former Epistle, and in this, had I not seen it necessary to clear my self of some Imputations, which might hinder the Usefulness of my Ministry.' He adds: *Or need we, as some others, Epistles of Commendation to you, or Letters of Commendation from you?* q. d. ' If I were seeking my self, or were chiefly solicitous to make an Interest for my self among you, I might use the little Arts of Insinuation, so happily practis'd by the false Teachers, who have obtain'd the Applause and Admiration they desir'd among you, and in order to it have taken Care not to come without Letters to recommend them. But I am above those Things, and have no need to commend my self, or to be commended to you, or by you?' And that he might make them sensible how needless any formal Recommendation was for him, he adds: *Ye are our Epistle written in our Hearts, known and read of all Men,* q. d. ' Ye are your selves my clearest Epistle, and the Commendation I more value my self upon, than any that Men can give me under their Hands. You your selves sufficiently commend me to the World; who, by observing what you are, may form a Judgment concerning me. In your Conversation, as in *Letters Patents*, all Men may read what Commission and Authority I have?' And then in the Words of the Text he gives them a Reason, why he accounted them such a Commendation of himself. *For as much as ye are manifestly declared to*
be

be the Epistle of Christ, ministred by us, written not with Ink, but with the Spirit of the Living God; not in Tables of Stone, but in fleshy Tables of the Heart. In speaking to which words, I shall do these Three following Things.

I. I will represent to you, what it was in the *Corinthians, that manifestly declared them to be the Epistle of Christ, viz.* Their unfeigned Conversion to Christianity.

II. I will shew you, *how* by their Conversion *they were manifestly declared to be the Epistle of Christ.*

III. I will inquire, how far it is warrantable for us now to esteem *any as the Epistle of Christ*; and to form a Judgment by such a kind of Rule, as that which the Apostle here goes upon.

I. I will represent to you, what it was in the *Corinthians, that manifestly declared them to be the Epistle of Christ.* Now that was *their unfeigned Conversion to Christianity.* Nothing else can be understood as referr'd to here. For it was somewhat effected by the Spirit of God, in the effecting which he made use of the Apostles Ministry, as is expressly asserted in the Text; *ministred,* says he, *by us, written not with Ink, but with* (that is, *by*) *the Spirit of the Living God.* And what can we imagine that to be, but their *Conversion*? Besides, it was somewhat *obvious* and plain to be discern'd; which not only their Fellow-Christians, but all others who had any Knowledge of them, might easily perceive, and could hardly avoid observing. To which purpose he speaks of them in the foregoing Verse, as *an Epistle known and read*

read of all Men. And such their Conversion was. The Alteration made in them was too great, not to command the Notice and Admiration of all about them. They had been Gentiles, carried away unto dumb Idols, even as they were led. But now they were convinced of the Unreasonableness of the Worship they formerly paid them; and knew that an Idol is nothing in the World (has nothing of Godhead in it, and that the Deity it represents is fictitious) and that there is none other God but one; and so to them there was now but one God the Father, of whom were all Things, and they in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom were all Things, and they by him. They were now, with the Thessalonians, turned to God from Idols, to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from Heaven.

I Cor. xii. 2.
viii. 4. 6.
I Thess. i. 9, 10.

AND as they had embrac'd a new Object, so likewise a new Manner of Worship; offering all their Worship thro' Jesus the Mediator, in a Subjection to whose Ordinances they voluntarily put themselves. They became the Subjects and Servants of a new Lord, and acted by the Direction of a new Law, intirely opposite to their former Manner and Course of Life. The change of their Notions would have been a small Matter, had not their new Notions influenced them to a more regular and orderly Conversation. Had they retain'd their old Vices in the Profession they made of a new Religion, they would have brought a Disgrace upon that, and have gain'd little Reputation to themselves. But the change was truly Glorious, and evidenc'd the Nobleness of that Religion they turn'd to, when they abandon'd all their former Impieties, and enter'd upon a strict Course of Piety and Virtue. In this Case,

Case, the Greatness of Mens former Enormities, instead of lessening, adds to the Reputation of that Religion, by which they are reclaim'd from them. For who can forbear admiring and praising that Religion, which of a sudden turns the worst of Men into the best? Now this was the Case of these *Corinthians*. Their City had been for a long time remarkable for Debauchery. Their Situation between two Seas gave them a vast Advantage above any City in *Greece* for Trade, that had render'd them exceeding Wealthy; and their Wealth had fed their Luxury, Intemperance and Lasciviousness: So that there were few, if any Cities, which did equal *Corinth* in the dissolute and sensual Lives of its Inhabitants, who were indeed infamous enough to become a *Proverb* among the *Greeks*. And we are not to think those *Corinthians*, who became *Converts* to Christianity, had escap'd the Contagion of the Place, any more than their Fellow-Citizens, who still persisted in their old Religion. We are certain of the contrary, by the Account given of them in the other Epistle. *Know ye not that the Unrighteous shall not inherit the Kingdom of God? Be not deceived, neither Fornicators, nor Idolaters, nor Adulterers, nor Effeminate, nor Abusers of themselves with Mankind, nor Thieves, nor Covetous, nor Drunkards, nor Revilers, nor Extortioners, shall inherit the Kingdom of God. And such were SOME OF YOU: but ye are washed, &c.* And when he says, *such were some of you*, he seems to mean that some of them had been bad enough to be chargeable, if not with all, yet with several of the worst and vilest of those Vices; or however, it is certain, he did not speak only of some with a Design of excepting the rest, as free from all these Abominations. This appears by his mentioning

B Idolaters

*I Cor. vi.
9, 10, 11.*

Idolaters, which was unquestionably the Character of every one of them before their *Conversion*. Now for such Vile and Profligate Wretches to become Sober, Temperate, Chast, Just, Devout, and, in a word, Exemplary in all those Duties and Virtues, which were most opposite to their former Vices, was an Illustrious change indeed, and most worthy to be mention'd, as it is in the Text, as a noble Commendation of their present Disposition and Behaviour, and of the Means whereby it was brought about. The

1 *Thef.* i. 8. Fame of such *Faith* as theirs *toward God*, could not but spread abroad in every Place. Such

Rom xvi. 19. eminent *Obedience* must come abroad unto all Men.

THEIR Church, it must be own'd, notwithstanding all the Time and Pains the Apostle had spent among them, had still some *Spots* and *Blemishes* in it, the Marks of its imperfect Militant State. For however he commends them, he reproves them too, and it appears by his Reproofs, there were some very disorderly Persons among them. But, in the main, they were an excellent Church, and thought worthy of much Commendation for their Conformity to the Rules of the Gospel. See how he commends them in the general, even when he was about to blame them for a particular Disorder. Now I praise you,

1 *Cor.* xi 2. *Brethren*, says he, *that you remember me in all Things, and keep the Ordinances as I deliver'd them to you.* There were some Hypocrites without doubt in That, as there always will be in every Church: But the Church was to receive her Denomination from the major Part, which was sound and good; and, at the writing of the former Epistle, when the Disorders were at the worst, deserved

deserved to be spoken of in such high Expressions. I thank my God always on your behalf, for the Grace ^{1 Cor. i. 4,} of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; that in ^{5, 6, 7.} every Thing ye are enriched by him, in all Utterance, and in all Knowledge: even as the Testimony of Christ was received among you. So that ye come behind in no Gift, waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. In which words, he thanks God not only for the Miraculous Gifts which that Church had plentifully received, and which, 'tis acknowledged, render'd their Conversion the more remarkable, but likewise for their Holiness and Piety. This appears by his mentioning their Waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is an usual Description of a Christian Conversation. And well it may be so, since Christs coming, wherever it is believ'd and seriously remember'd, as it is by all those who wait for it, must necessarily make Men Holy in all manner of Conversation. And I conceive it is upon the account of their Holiness, and not their extraordinary Gifts, they are commended in the Text, and stiled the Epistle of Christ. The last Words of the Verse seem to confine the Expression to this Sense, wherein he says, This Epistle was written not in Tables of Stone, but in fleshy Tables of the Heart: which certainly refers not to their Miraculous Gifts, but wholly to the Law of Christ; the Writing of which is compar'd to, and preferr'd before the Writing of the Law, which God gave to Moses. But this leads me to consider,

II. HOW the Corinthians by their Conversion were manifestly declared to be the Epistle of Christ. Now this Expression may import these Two Things.

1. THAT *Christ* was the *Author* of their Conversion. An Epistle is said to be his, by whose Direction 'tis penn'd and drawn up. In like manner, when their Conversion is spoken of under the Metaphor of an Epistle (of which a Reason will be presently given) 'tis most properly attributed to *Christ* as the Author and Composer of it.

THE Apostles were tender of the Honour of their *Lord*, and cautious of assuming any Thing to themselves, lest they should seem to derogate from him. And so this Apostle speaks of himself only as an *Amanuensis*, employ'd by *Christ* in writing the Epistle. *Ministred*, says he, *by us; written not with Ink, but by the Spirit of the Living God.* And therefore in the next Verse but one, he adds: *Not that we are sufficient of our selves to think any Thing as of our selves: but our sufficiency is of God, who also hath made us able Ministers of the New Testament.* However he had been employ'd, yet he neither was, nor would be thought to be, the principal Cause of that Blessed Work: No; he look'd upon himself, and his Companions in preaching the Gospel to the *Corinthians*, as *Ministers by whom they believed, even as the Lord gave to every Man.* And whatever Industry they used in *Planting and Watering*, yet the Success was wholly to be ascrib'd to God, *who gave the Increase.* In their preaching, *they were Labourers together with God, or rather perhaps of God; that is, employ'd by him; whence such as were Converted by their Ministry were to be look'd upon as God's Husbandry, as God's Building.*

1 Cor. iii.
3, 6, 9.

THE Work is too great to be accomplish'd by Humane Skill. The Charms of Eloquence, and the Strength

Strength of Reason and Argument alone can never assuage Boisterous Passions, conquer Impetuous Desires, and win the Sinner bewitch'd to his Lusts, to an unfeigned and chearful Subjection to the Law of God. How often do we see the strongest Arguments from Everlasting Rewards and Punishments prove Ineffectual! Nay, Arguments drawn from such Things as Sinners regard, have very little Force upon those, who are strongly addicted to their Lusts. The Misery and Want Extravagances threaten them with, either by their natural Tendency, or their Offensiveness to their best Friends, will not conquer, nay, frequently not so much as curb and restrain for a little Time their Inclination to them. Vicious Inclinations are the most unreasonable Things in the World, and therefore somewhat more than bare Reason and Argument is necessary to rectify a Mind inflav'd by them, and to form it to a Divine likeness. This is only to be effected by a mighty Power. Whence 'tis so commonly in the Scripture ascrib'd to *the Holy Spirit*; as 'tis particularly in the Text: *Written not with Ink, but by the Spirit of the Living God.*

BUT it may be here inquir'd: Would it not upon this Account have been most proper to have stiled these *Corinthians* the *Epistle of the Holy Spirit*?

I Answer: WE are here to consider in what Quality the *Holy Spirit* acts, and that is, as the *Viceroy* and Deputy of our *Redeemer*, who promis'd, when he was leaving the World, to supply the want of his own Presence with them in Person, by his Spirit, and to be thus *with them alway*, even *Matth. xxviii. 20.* *unto the End of the World.* So that what the Spi-rit

rit now does, he does in the Name and Behalf of Christ; and our Redeemer now accomplishes all his Work in this World by his Spirit. Wherefore though the Spirit was the immediate Author of their Conversion, 'tis without any manner of Impropriety ascrib'd to Christ, and they are called *the Epistle of Christ*.

2. WHEN the Apostle calls the *Corinthians*, upon the account of their Conversion, *the Epistle of Christ*, he means, that Christ had thereby made some *Declaration* of his Mind. We consider an Epistle as a signification of the Mind of the Writer: and such did he look upon the *Corinthians* in their Conversion to be; which, I conceive, is the true Reason why he makes use of this Metaphor. And without straining it, we may say they are represented as *the Epistle of Christ*, or a Declaration of his Will, upon a double account.

1. BECAUSE they were by their Conversion form'd into the Mind and Will of Christ. He has made a Declaration of his Will in his Word, from which we are to learn our Religion, and to which we are to have recourse as to a sure Standard, in the examining and trying every Doctrine. But little Notice is taken of this by a careless World, who will not be at the Pains of learning what our Religion is out of the perfect Rule of it. Christ therefore has taken care in a more easie way to give them some Notices of it; and by changing the Hearts and Lives of Sinners, he sets before their Eyes examples of the Religion he has instituted, and shews the World what the Design of his Gospel is. This is a likely means of abating their unreasonable Prejudices, and winning them to an attentive Consideration of the Revelation he has left

left us. For if Men will allow themselves to make any serious Reflections, they must be sensible of an extraordinary Excellency and Loveliness in a truly Christian Conversation. When the Rules of the Gospel are copied out fairly into the Life, the Lustre of them is too great not to strike the Beholders with Admiration. This should make Christians careful to live up to their Rule, that, as our Saviour says, *their Light may so shine before Men, as that they may see their good Works, and glorify their Father who is in Heaven.* 'Tis no unlikely Thing, that such as at present *do not obey the Word,* Mat. v. 16. 1 Pet. iii. 1, 2. *may without the Word by beholding the good Conversion* of Christians be won, first to a liking, and then to an hearty embracing Christianity. So that the circumspect Deportment of Christians is a compendious kind of Declaration of the Mind of Christ to an inconsiderate World; who may by beholding it learn what Sobriety, Temperance, Humility, Meekness, Self-Denial, Equity, Charity, Mercifulness, Trust in God, Resignation and Devotedness to his Will, and, in short, what universal Holiness Christ expects in his Disciples and Followers.

WE are led to this Sense of the Expression by the last Clause of the Text, wherein he compares their Conversion to the giving of the Old Law, and says, *this Epistle of Christ was not written in Tables of Stone, but in fleshy Tables of the Heart* q. d. 'This is a more excellent and noble Way, which Christ has taken to write, and, as it were, publish his Law. He has deeply ingraven it upon, and made it an inward governing Principle of your Hearts and all your Actions which proceed from them; by Means whereof all that converse with you may easily come to the Knowledge of it?' IT

IT cannot be objected reasonably against this Sense, that the Expression is too great for the Thing; since that is sometimes set forth in the Holy Scriptures by more lofty Expressions than *the Epistle of Christ*: Such as *Christ formed in Christians*, and *Christ dwelling in them*. True Christians then are *the Epistle of Christ*; when their Conversation is conform'd to the Rule of the Gospel, and appears a kind of *Transcript* of the Mind and Will of Christ.

2. THE *Corinthians* are here call'd *the Epistle of Christ* upon the account of their Conversion, because Christ thereby signified his Mind concerning the Apostle, and gave a *Testimonial* of his Commission and valid Authority. *Ye are*, says he, *the Epistle of Christ, ministred by us*, q. d. 'Christ design'd, by making use of me in Converting you, to give an Attestation, and set as it were his Seal to my Ministry. He has made it evident that he sent me, by his working together with me.'

I Cor. ix.
1, 2.

AND what Argument could be more proper to establish his Authority with the *Corinthians* than this; of the Truth of which they must be suppos'd to be well assur'd? Compare herewith his manner of Arguing with the same Church in his other Epistle to them. *Am I not an Apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? are not you my Work in the Lord? If I be not an Apostle unto others, yet doubtless I am to you: for the Seal of mine Apostleship are ye in the Lord*. Where he appeals, as he does in the Text, to the happy Success of his Ministry among them; to *their being his Work in the Lord*; and therefore stiles them *the Seal of his Apostleship*; and Argues, that though his

Apostle-

Apostleship should be doubtful to others, yet it could not be so to them, since they had the same Evidence of it they had of their own Christianity.

AND thus likewise he argues elsewhere in his Second Epistle to them. *Since ye seek a Proof of 2 Cor. xiii. Christ speaking in me, which to you-ward is not weak, 3. 5. but is mighty in you — Examine your selves whether ye be in the Faith; prove your own selves.* He judg'd their being in the Faith an evident Proof of Christ's speaking in him, and owning him as his Minister.

AND when in the Text he calls them *the Epistle of Christ, written not in Tables of Stone, but in fleshy Tables of the Heart*; he certainly intimates, that as God's writing the Law in *Tables of Stone* was an Attestation of the Commission of *Moses*, to whom he deliver'd them, to carry them to the People; so the *Corinthians* were to look upon Christ's writing his Laws in their Hearts, as an Attestation of his Commission, whose Ministry he was pleas'd to make use of in doing it. And upon this account he calls them *his own Epistle* in the foregoing Verse, whom he calls *the Epistle of Christ* in the Text. *Ye are*, says he, *our Epistle*; that is, written in my Behalf: ye are the Epistle by which Christ has been pleas'd to recommend me.

NOW his Argument here is of this Nature. You *Corinthians* have been effectually prevail'd upon to relinquish your Idolatrous and wicked Course of Life, and to turn sincerely to God by Christ. This happy Change was too Great, Noble and Difficult to be effected by any Humane Skill and Power, and must therefore have been the

Work of the Redeemer. Christ, who has wrought you to this, has done it by my Ministry. But it is not to be thought, he would thus concur with, or make use of a Ministry, which he did not approve. And therefore I may well esteem his Converting you by my Means as an Attestation to my Ministry, and may look upon you *as manifestly declared to be the Epistle of Christ*, written in my Behalf, whereby he does in effect Ratify and Seal to you, and to the World, my Ministry and Apostleship.

AND thus I have endeavour'd to explain the Apostles meaning, and clear his Reasoning to you. And doubtless *these Things were written*, and are in the Scriptures handed down to us, *for our Learning*; and therefore 'tis not improper for us,

III. TO inquire, How far 'tis warrantable for us now to esteem any *as the Epistle of Christ*, and to form a Judgment concerning the Ministers of the present Time by such a kind of Rule, as that which the Apostle here goes upon. There would have been less Occasion to treat of this Matter, had not some Men appear'd so earnestly desirous of condemning the Ministry of their Neighbours. Of whom it may well be said, as 'tis of some who troubled the *Galatians*; *They zealously affect you, but not well; yea, they would exclude you*, (some Copies read *us* — To express our Case we may join both; for they would *exclude both you and us*; *you* from the Church; and *us* from the Ministry) *that you might affect them*, and confine your Respects to them. I suppose every one will allow, that 'tis very desirable, some certain Scripture Rule should be propos'd to examine Mens Pretensions by, and that it should be such an one as is level to the Capacities

pacities of all, since every Christian is to judge and chuse for himself what Ministry to sit under. Now with such a Rule, I think, the Discourse of the Apostle here supplies us. For if we may judge by the Success and Usefulness of any Ministry, that is a thing liable to the Observation of the meanest Christian, who is dispos'd seriously to inquire what Ministry he should prefer.

I shall briefly comprise my Sense of this Matter in these following Propositions :

1. 'Tis certain, when our Lord erected a Church, he design'd to *continue* it to the End of the World. This is evident by his Promise, that *the Gates of* Matth. xvi. 18. *Hell should not prevail against it.*

2. As Christ will have a Church, so he will have a Ministry in it through all *Ages* of the World.. For the Proof of which I need only appeal to that express Text ; *He gave some, Apostles : and some,* Eph. iv. *Prophets : and some, Evangelists : and some, Pastors* 11, 12, 13. *and Teachers ; for the perfecting of the Saints, for the Work of the Ministry, for the edifying the Body of Christ : till we all come in the Unity of the Faith, and of the Knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect Man, unto the Measure of the Stature of the Fulness of Christ.*

3. If Christ has a Ministry for the Edification of his Church, then that Ministry may be *known* and distinguish'd. Were there no Marks, by which the Church could distinguish the Officers he has appointed for their Edification, how should they know to whom they should apply themselves, or in what Method they should seek their Edification? As Christ the great Shepherd has appointed She-

pherds under him to feed his Flock, so he cannot be suppos'd to have left his Flock wholly at *Uncertainties*, who they are, to whom they should commit themselves in order to their being fed.

4. THE true Ministers of Christ's Church, in the *first* Planting of it, were distinguish'd by some Marks, by which those in succeeding Ages cannot be known. When the first Foundations of the Christian Church were to be laid, and Christ's Ministers were sent forth to spread a New Religion in the World, not only extraordinary Degrees of Wisdom, Holiness and Courage, but an extraordinary Attestation of their Commission was necessary. Hence the Apostles, who were first sent forth, were endow'd with a Power of working Miracles, and Discerning Spirits; which, together with all such extraordinary Operations of the Spirit, are long since ceased, and consequently cannot be the Marks of the true Ministry in the present Age. There is no Church or Ministry now in the World, which pretends to these, except the Church of Rome, which has been detected in so many of her Forgeries, that, instead of advancing, she has sunk her Reputation with all wise Men, by pretending to them. Among *Protestants* there are none, who appeal to any *such* Evidence of their Commission.

5. Since those extraordinary Gifts, which the Apostles appeal'd to as Evidences of their Commission, are universally ceas'd, 'tis but reasonable the Pretensions of Ministers should now be examin'd by any *other* Evidences they appeal'd to, and particularly by this of *Success*. For certainly they did not attempt to establish their Authority by any weak and insufficient Arguments. And indeed by appealing

appealing to the Evidence, which did not depend upon their extraordinary Gifts, they may be understood to direct Christians, how to judge of Mens Pretensions in all the following Ages of the World. And consequently it cannot be thought unreasonable for Christians now to lay a great stress upon this Argument from Success, since the Apostles themselves did so.

6. **THOUGH** the Success of the Apostles and first Ministers of the Christian Church might, upon the account of some Circumstances, have an Advantage above that of the Ministers of succeeding Ages; yet the *main* Reason, why Success was an Argument in the Behalf of their Ministry, will hold good to vindicate any successful Ministry to the End of the World. The Number of their Converts, and their being Converted from Gentilism and the grossest Idolatry, must be own'd to be Circumstances which greatly enhanc'd the Success of their Ministry: but still the *Principal* Reason, why Success was an Attestation of the Apostles Commission, was, that from the Success it appear'd Christ own'd their Ministry by making it effectual, the Work being too great to be wrought by any but himself. Now this is true in all Ages, and the Conversion of a Sinner, and the establishing and improving him afterward, must now as necessarily be the Work of Christ by his Spirit, as at first. And therefore Success must as really argue the Interposition of Christ now as ever. And if his Interposition was *formerly*, it must be *still* an Evidence of his owning and authorizing any Ministry.

7. **THERE** is the more the Reason to argue the Validity of any Ministry from the Success of it, because this is an Argument from the principal
Design

Design and End of the Office. I cannot easily imagine by what better Rule we can judge of the Goodness of any Thing, than by its intire Tendency and Usefulness to promote the chief *End* of it. This was the main Reason of the Institution of the Ministry, that Sinners might be Converted, and Saints Edified. That Ministry therefore, which contributes most to the effecting these Things, must, without all Question, be the Ministry which the Author of the Institution does most approve.

AS that Religion must be best, which is best contriv'd in its Doctrines, Rules and Motives to make Men universally Holy; and the Christian Religion has in this Respect vastly the Advantage above any other; so that Ministry seems always to me most approv'd of Christ, and therefore fittest to be chosen by Christians, which is best adapted to promote true Christianity, and, by the Blessing of Christ, is made most effectual to that End. Nor can I apprehend it dangerous for Christians to have a regard to this Rule in making their Choice. For, however they may find themselves puzzled with the Subtilties of a Dispute, and may perhaps be at a loss what to think of a particular Mode and Ceremony, whether it be pleasing to Christ, or no; yet that an Universal Holiness, which is the Image of God and of Christ, is pleasing to him, must be past all Doubt and Question with them. And there will be good Reason for them to judge the Ministers are *Labourers together with God* (or of God) if they can evidently discern their People are *God's Husbandry, are God's Building*.

1 Cor. iii. 9.

THIS Evidence from Success may be much strengthen'd by various other Circumstances, which Christians will easily observe to attend a
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Successful Ministry, and whereby Christ, who would not have his People be at a loss about the Means of their Edification, will take Care to recommend to them that Ministry, which he best likes, and will most own. Give me leave to name a few of these.

1. WITHOUT all doubt a competent Measure of *Scripture-Knowledge*, a Profession of the true Faith, and a Renouncing such Opinions as are inconsistent with Christianity, always accompany the Ministry which Christ owns with Success. Such are requir'd to be *apt to teach*; but ^{1 Tim. iii. 2.} how can they be so, if they are unacquainted with the very Rule of their Teaching? *The Scripture is* ^{2 Tim. ii.} *profitable for Doctrine, for Reproof, for Correction, 16, 17.* *for Instruction in Righteousness. That the Man of God (or Minister of the Gospel) may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good Works.* 'Tis desirable, they, who are design'd to teach others, should be, as *Timothy* was, brought up from their Childhood, in the Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures. And if Men profess and preach any thing inconsistent with the main essential Doctrines of Christianity, they subvert Mens Souls, and cannot be the Means of saving them. Christ owns not such with Success: but they are *grievous Wolves, that* ^{Act. xx. 29.} *spare not the Flock.* 'Tis therefore a necessary Qualification of true Ministers, that they *hold fast* ^{Ti. i. 9.} *the faithful Word, as they have been taught, that they may be able by sound Doctrine, both to exhort and to convince the Gainsayers.*

2. I cannot but think, an apparent *Regularity* of Life and Conversation is one Qualification of the Ministers, whom Christ is pleased to own with Success, and whom Christians should chuse to adhere

adhere to. I am sure, this is absolutely necessary, if we may judge by the Epistles to *Timothy* and *Titus*; the Author of which thought it very proper also to mention the Regularity of his own Behaviour, when he would recommend himself to the

1 *Thess.* ii. *10.* *Thessalonians. Ye are Witnesses, says he, and God also, how holily, and justly and unblameably we behaved our selves among you that believe.* Men will never be heartily concern'd to spread that Religion, which they have not themselves cordially embrac'd. Hypocrites may crowd themselves into the *Ministry*, as well as into the *Church*, and may demean themselves so as to pass undiscern'd: And in that Case it may please God to render their Ministry successful. Charity teaches us to judge Men sincere in their Pretences, till they evidence the contrary. And it were sad indeed for the Church of God, if their Edification were so precarious, as absolutely to depend upon the internal Holiness and Sincerity of their Ministers. God therefore, out of a regard to his own Institution, and that Charity which he approves in Christians, may succeed the Ministrations of such. But when these Hypocrites pull off the Mask, and retain not any longer the outward shew of Holiness and Piety, but become openly and scandalously loose, they forfeit all Claim to the respect and charitable Opinion of the Church of God, and are to be avoided by all serious Christians. Now 'tis not in this Case Charity, but downright Folly and Madness, for Men to think they may safely put their Souls under their Care; since 'tis notorious they take no Care of their own. And as all Hypocrites invading the Office are un approv'd of God, so when their Hypocrisy is made manifest to all, and 'tis therefore apparently Christians Duty to forsake them; I cannot think, God does any longer own them with

with Success upon those, who through a supine Negligence and Sloth remain contented under their Ministry, without seeking out after a better, as they are bound to do, at the Peril of their precious Souls.

3. WHEREVER Christ owns a Ministry with Success, the main Tendency of it will evidently be to promote the *most momentous* and indisputable Matters of Religion, and not the little *Peculiarities* of a Party. There are some Things, of which we may say what is said of Meat: *They commend us not to God; for neither if we use them, are we the better, neither if we use them not, are we the worse.* And where Things of this Nature (to speak the most favourably of them) are much dwelt upon, and urged with the greatest Vehemence, 'tis visible what the Success is. A Ministers Judgment may be right concerning the Lawfulness or Unlawfulness of less substantial Things which are Matter of Debate; and yet, by allowing an undue Proportion of his Ministry and his Zeal to them, may very much hinder his promoting those Ends, by which the Success of any Ministry is chiefly to be discern'd. The great and essential Things, that constitute the *Kingdom of God* (that *Kingdom of God*, which, our Saviour says, *cometh not with Observation, or Pomp and Splendour; but is within Men*) are not Meat and Drink, but Righteousness, and Peace, and Joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in these Things serveth Christ, is acceptable to God, and approved of Men. There is no Party, but a Man may be moulded into the Notions and Forms by which 'tis distinguish'd, and yet remain unacceptable to God. But there is no Party of Christians, wherein Righteousness, and Peace, and Joy in the Holy Ghost, will not

1 Cor. viii. 8.

Luke xvii. 21.

Rom. xiv. 17, 18.

not evidence a Man a true Subject of *the Kingdom of God*, a Servant of Christ, and most acceptable to both.

THE Design of the Ministry is to renew depraved Souls, to restore them to a likeness to God in Righteousness and Holiness, and so to fit them for a Blissful and Eternal abode in his Presence; and, in order to these Things, to gain them to an unfeigned and intire Subjection to the Mediator. The Success of any Ministry lies in obtaining these Ends, and without that all a Minister's Pains are lost. And as that Ministry, which dwells most upon these Things, is most adapted to its proper end, so 'tis not hard to observe, that the Blessing of Christ most attends and prospers it.

4. THE Success and Usefulness of any Ministry will then be more easily judg'd an Evidence of its *Validity*, when the *Opposition* made against it is built most upon *weak* and fallible Authorities, and but little upon the Holy Scriptures. The whole of a Christian's Religion is in his *Bible*, and when he is requir'd to walk by any other Rule than that of Divine Revelation, by those who would *seem to be somewhat, whatsoever they are, it must make no matter to him, he is not to give place to them by Subjection, no, not for an Hour*. If he finds a Ministry agreeable to the Holy Scriptures, he may be satisfied in chusing it, without inquiring whether Fathers, Synods, or Magistrates approve it. And it will always be an Argument with me of the *Validity* of any Ministry, when I see the fierce and crafty Adversaries of it at a great Loss for Scripture-Arguments to overthrow it.

Cal.ii. 5,6.

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5. THE Argument from Success receives an additional Strength, when that Success is obtain'd by a Ministry, notwithstanding many worldly *Discouragements* which attend it. It has been ordinarily the Lot of God's most faithful Servants to meet with little Countenance from Men. The World lies in Wickedness, and the Stream uses to run strongly against those who testify against the Wickedness of it.

A *Persecuting Spirit* is a shrewd sign of an ill Cause; and those Men, *whose Weapons are Carnal*, and who desire to enforce their Discipline by Oppression, manage their *Warfare* in a very different manner from the Apostles. But to be used hardly and unkindly, to be despis'd and persecuted for Conscience-sake, yields a strong Presumption of a Mans Sincerity, and that he is accusom'd to the Practice of the Duty of Self-Denial, which our Lord has declar'd absolutely necessary in all his Disciples. And when they, who have no Carnal Weapons to back their Arguments, but meet with a violent Opposition from their Neighbours, are favour'd with the most Success in their Ministrations, 'tis a sign of the Goodness of their Warfare, and that *their Weapons are, tho' not Carnal; yet* 2 Cor. x. 4. *mighty through God, to the pulling down strong Holds.* The Divine Power is more conspicuous, in converting Sinners, when there are no worldly Advantages on the side of Truth to recommend it.

IT cannot be thought unreasonable to lay some Stress upon this, since the Apostle in this very Epistle argues from some such Considerations the Preferableness of his own Ministry to that of his Competitors; and speaks, as though an excess in

Suffering, were a full Proof of a Superiority in
 2 Cor. xi. 23. Office. *Are they Ministers of Christ? (I speak as a Fool) I am more: In Labours more abundant, in Stripes above Measure (or more exceedingly) in Prisons more frequent, in Deaths oft, &c.*

I forbear to mention, as I might, other Characters of a true Ministry, but proceed to apply what has been said in these Three following Reflections.

I. IF by such Things, as those insisted on, the Validity and Goodness of any Ministry may be discern'd, the *Objections* against our Ministry are certainly of no Moment; but our *Claims* and Pretensions must be supported by much better and stronger Arguments, than are theirs who object with so much Fury against us. As often as I seriously consider the State of our present Differences, and review the little Observation I have made in the World, I am forc'd to fall in and finish all with that Determination: *Sit anima mea cum Puritanis Anglicanis.* And 'tis a considerable Pleasure and Satisfaction to me, to find my self join'd with those on Earth, with whom, my Conscience tells me, I cannot but desire to be number'd at the great Separation of the last Day.

I am sensible this Argument may seem *invidious*, and many will be apt to think it carries in it an Air of *Boasting*, and so of Vanity and Folly. But they, who will be forwardest to censure our Argument, have, of all Men, most Reason to be satisfied with the Apology, which, with the Apostle, we make for our selves. For if we are be-
 2 Cor. xii. 11. *come Fools in Glorifying*, we may well expect They should bear with our Folly, since They are themselves

selves the Persons *who have compell'd us*. I hope it will be no Offence, that we shew our selves tender of the Reputation of our Ministry. If we were as indifferent about that as we see many are, we should have little Reason to complain of any Persons judging us unworthy of the Character. I am sure none can have Reason to be offended, that in a Place, where we are assaulted with so much Violence, we defend our selves, and for a Justification of our Ministry appeal with the Apostle to the Usefulness of it, humbly requesting our Adversaries, if they think fit, to put their Ministry upon the like Trial.

LET then the Lives and *Conversations* of our People be compar'd with those of their Neighbours; I am sure we need not fear the Sentence of any indifferent and impartial Judge. Nay, our Adversaries themselves must give it in our Favour, if they will but honestly own, by what Rule they guess at the Characters and Principles of Strangers when they happen into their Company. Let them but frankly declare, on which side they ordinarily suspect the Swearer and the Drunkard to be, and what Opinion they entertain of such as abstain from and shew an abhorrence of those Vices.

I own we are not free from *Hypocrites*. What Church ever was from the Beginning of the World? Nor are we clear in our Assemblies of all loose Persons; but I verily think our Communion are not ordinarily reproach'd for Persons openly scandalous and profane. Those of such a Character must belong to another, if they are of any Communion; for no Interest of a Party prevails with us to receive or keep them knowingly in ours. No one, that I know of, charges us with suffering

ing the Deists and open Debauchers to thrust themselves in to receive the Lord's Supper among us, as a Qualification for Offices and Places of Profit and Trust, to the Scandal of our Function, and the vilest Prostitution of the most Sacred of all our Lord's Ordinances and Institutions. When such as have been brought up among us become loose and vicious, they know they can't expect to be easy in our Communion, and therefore soon leave us; and, I hope, without our Regret, unless we could see them mend among us. And the Usefulness of our Ministry is confirm'd by this common Observation: That such as leave us ordinarily grow worse, and they who come over to us frequently grow better.

FARTHER; Were not our People free from the horrid Sins, which are so prevailing in the Land, their Adversaries would not fail to make them hear of them, and would have less Occasion to charge them so often with suspected Crimes only without Evidence; and the Cry of Hypocrisy would be much weaker, and the Charge of particular Vices and Immoralities, that could be prov'd, would be much lower. Were scandalous Persons as rife in our Communion, as in theirs, they would not triumph at the rate they sometimes do; when they think they have got an Advantage by a particular Person's disgracing his Profession. Single Instances of Immorality among us would then be as little taken notice of as they are now among them. In short; if *Sobriety, Righteousness and Godliness* are the great Things, which *the Grace of God teaches*, and the Grace of God is there best learn'd, and consequently best taught, where these things are most prevailing; we may safely venture the Reputation of our Ministry upon this Issue, what

what Communion these Things are most to be found in; and that notwithstanding the vast Inequality of our Numbers.

WHEN our Interest was very great in the Nation, and it was thought necessary to weaken, and (if possible) destroy it, Persecution and the encouraging Vice and Debauchery were judg'd the most proper Methods in Order to it. And when *Iniquity abounded*, our Interest with that of Religion, or plain common Christianity (for we plead for no other) considerably declin'd, and our Ministry became less Successful than it had been before. And yet I doubt not but the greatest share of the little Religion and Piety, that has continued in the Nation, has been owing to that Ministry, which is at this Day so much despised and vilified. And doubtless the Methods, which our Adversaries then took, discover'd plainly enough what Opinion they had of us, and that their Displeasure against us was, because they thought we had too much Religion; although God at the same time permitted their Fury, that by his Righteous Judgments he might rebuke us for having so little, and sinking so much below the Piety of our Ancestors.

FARTHER; If Men will calmly consider Things, the other Circumstances I mention'd, will, I doubt not, be found to accompany and recommend the Ministry I plead for.

1. OUR Adversaries themselves pretend not, I think, to charge us with holding Opinions contrary to the *Christian Faith*. They are pleas'd indeed to make a shew of despising us as meanly qualified. And 'tis no wonder, if under our *Dis-*
advantages

advantages there are some, whose *Attainments* in Learning are less than one would desire in a Minister. They ought not however to bear hard upon us ; considering how much worse it has been with themselves, and that there was a Time, when many illiterate Tradesmen were put into the Ministry among themselves, whose publick Performances were only Reading Prayers and Homilies, and considering especially that notwithstanding all their present Advantages, 'tis much worse with them still. For, I hope, *the greater part of those, who come to be Ordained among us, are not ignorant to a Degree not to be apprehended by those, who are not obliged to know it ; and that the easiest Part of Knowledge is not that to which they are the greatest Strangers, I mean, the plainest parts of the Scriptures.* I am well satisfied, if there could be found any so ignorant among us, they could not say in excuse of their Ignorance, *That their Tutors never mention the reading of the Scriptures to them.* We have none so unacquainted with the Scriptures, as that they can give no Account, or at least a very imperfect one, of the Contents even of the Gospels. We have none, whose Ignorance is such, that in a well regulated State of Things they would appear not knowing enough to be admitted to the Holy Sacrament. I hope, so gross an Ignorance in the Fundamentals of Religion has not spread it self so much among those of our Side, who ought to teach others, as that they need that one teach them the first Principles of the Oracles of God. Such kind of Insufficiency they will not charge us with, as they know we can them, upon the Evidence and Testimony of an excellent Person, who has an opportunity of knowing it, and is too honest and fair to Dissemble that sad Truth, which

See Bishop
of Sarum's
Pref. to his
Past. Care,
p. 5, 6.

he

he is forc'd, with all Good Men, grievously to bewail.

2. OUR Ministers are not *loose* and disorderly in their Behaviour. When any become so, they soon sink their Reputation, and their Ministry is quickly at an End among us. Or, if it be not, the People only can be to blame, who, as they ought, so they have it in their Power easily to rid themselves of it. And 'tis unreasonable we should be reproach'd with any vicious Persons, whom we have rejected; at least, it will not be very modest for those to upbraid us, who have been so kind as to receive them to officiate in their own Church.

3. NOTHING can be more evident to those, who are at all acquainted with our Ministry, than that it aims at promoting the great and *essential* Things of our Holy Religion, *viz.* The explaining and urging upon Men *Repentance* toward God, *Faith* in our Lord Jesus Christ, and an universal *Obedience* to his Laws.

WE have plainly discover'd a greater Concern to make our Hearers *good Christians*, than *zealous Party-Men*. And, to speak freely, I think we have been almost universally guilty of an Error, tho' 'tis an Error (as they say) on the right Hand: That we have wholly, in a manner, wav'd in our Sermons the Matters in Controversy between us and our Adversaries, which though they are of little Moment, if compar'd with the other, yet doubtless are of too great Moment to be quite left out of our Discourses. Herein, I think, we have been injurious to our own Interest and that of Truth.

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BUT if we consider what Course has been taken by many of our Adversaries, their Errour will appear to have been much worse. The Heat of their Zeal against us has consum'd their Discretion, and their very Ministry itself. The Tendency of a great part of their Sermons has been not to inform but abuse Mens Judgments, and inflame their Anger and Wrath. They have not only lavish'd away their Ministry upon the least useful Subjects, but by their Preaching have render'd their Hearers of a more malicious and inveterate, that is, of a more Unchristian Spirit than they would otherwise have been.

4. WITH what *Weapons* have our Adversaries managed their Opposition against our Ministry? Those who are vers'd in our Controversy cannot but observe a great scarcity of Scripture-Arguments; where our Adversaries should have been most copious in them, considering what great Strefs they are pleas'd to lay upon the Things; for what Reason they can tell best themselves. One chief Aim of their Managers seems to be, to lead Men from the *Scriptures* to *Fathers* and *Councils*, not because their Constitution is not condemn'd by them, but because they know the People have neither Time, nor Capacity to examine these; and so when they have got them into such a Wood, they hope easily to bewilder and loose them in it.

'TIS visible, the little narrow Interest of a *Party* runs thro' all that some Men meddle with, and spoils much Good, which some of their Designs would otherwise probably produce, and in the Advancement of which, if they were generously pursued, we should readily join with them. I appeal

peal for the Truth of what I say, to their Management of *Charity Schools*, and their *Society for Propagating the Gospel*: Concerning which I must say: 'Tis great Pity good Designs should be spoiled, and that Men should give so much Occasion that *their Good should be evil spoken of*.

I would not here be misunderstood, as though, while I make this Comparison, I design'd to *confine* the Success of the Ministry to that of any one single Denomination among us. I perswade my self, there are among the Ministers of all Parties, those, who prefer the most important Matters of Religion to the lesser Things, by which their Party is distinguish'd. And where the Appearance is smallest, we will not easily be perswaded that their Case is not better than that of the Church of *Sardis*, which, notwithstanding all her Faults, deserv'd this Testimony of our Lord: *Thou hast a few Names even in Sardis*. So gloriously does Charity overcome and triumph over that Unreasonableness, Unmercifulness and Cruelty that oppose it. Would to God our Adversaries, who seem to have a very defective Notion of that Virtue, the Name of which they so much magnify, would so far lay aside their Prejudices, as to look abroad among their Neighbours, and learn from them, what that Charity is, which *suffers long, and is kind, which neither envieth, nor is rash, which seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in Iniquity, which beareth all Things, endureth all Things, hopeth all Things, and sometimes hopeth against Hope*. For our part, we can truly say: When we see Ministers unblemish'd in their Reputation, and zealous in their Endeavours to promote the great Ends of our Holy Religion, we heartily rejoice; we desire

Rev. iii. 4;

I Cor. xiii.
4, 5, 6, 7.

not they should be *forbidden*, or any ways hinder'd, much less that *Fire* should come down from *Heaven* and consume them, though they follow not with us: May they go and prosper. For since they work the Works of the Lord, even as we also do, and in the main walk by the same Rule with us, why should we not wish, that Peace may be on them, as we doubt not, they also do on us? But give me leave to say: that these, though the Ornaments of their Communion, can add but little Reputation to the angry Generation, who are so free in condemning us. My Reason is; because they are asham'd of all such, and number them on our Side; who own our selves not displeas'd at our having them, and all honest and good Men reckon'd in the same Interest with our selves.

5. FINALLY; The bitterest of all our Adversaries themselves cannot be displeas'd, if of the last Circumstance, which serves to recommend a Ministry, we speak with some kind of Triumph; I mean, our being embarrass'd with all visible *Discouragements*. For we can bear them Record, they have been always industrious to furnish us with it, and have been willing we should keep this Argument intirely to our selves. And for our part, we are contentedly destitute of those secular Advantages, without which, we apprehend their Cause would soon sink to the Ground. We envy them not their *Tithes* and *large Revenues*. Though our Subsistence is meaner and more precarious, yet 'tis the more satisfactory to us, because it comes in just the same honest Way it did to the Apostles and first Ministers of the Christian Church. We repine not, that we have no *Spiritual Courts* (as they call them) to inforce our Discipline

cipline with a Temporal Power. If the Authority of Christ will not make Men regard us, we own we are not dispos'd to drive a Trade in *Excommunications and Absolutions*, which yet (I promise you) is like to prove a very profitable one, as soon as ever the People can be enslav'd into the Belief of the Priests absolute Power of forgiving Sins. And while our Consciences are clear, and testify we have not at the Hands of Men deserv'd them, we glory in the Hardships formerly or lately laid upon us. *We take Pleasure in Infirmities, in Reproaches, in Necessities, in Persecutions,* ^{2 Cor. xii. 10.} *in Distresses for Christ's sake.* We hope we have ^{2 Cor. vi. 4, 5, 8, 9.} *in all Things approved our selves as the Ministers of God, in much Patience, in Afflictions, in Necessities, in Distresses, in Imprisonments, in Tumults, by Honour and Dishonour, by evil Report and good Report: as Deceivers and yet True, as unknown and yet well known.* And since such Things are suppos'd to enhance and embellish the Character of a Minister, we take the Liberty to say of our Adversaries. *Are they Ministers of Christ? We are more.*

2. IF the Success of any Ministry is an evidence of the Goodness of it; this may very well be applied to those in the Ministry; and may serve to direct them in their Aims, and quicken them in their Endeavours. Let us, my Brethren, make it our chief Aim to form our Hearers to the Mind and Will of Christ. In what Pain was this great Apostle of the Gentiles for the Success of his Ministry. *My little Children,* says he to ^{Gal. iv. 19.} *the Galatians, of whom I travail again in Birth, until Christ be form'd in you.* He tells his *Corinthians:* *He was jealous over them with a Godly* ^{2 Cor. xi. 2, 3.} *jealousy, because he had espoused them to one Husband, that he might present them as a chaste Virgin*

to Christ: But he now fear'd, lest by any Means as the Serpent beguiled Eve through his Subtily, so their Minds should be corrupted from the Simplicity that is in Christ. So earnestly intent was he upon this Design, that he gave himself wholly to the preaching of the Gospel, as the most likely way to promote it, and therefore left the Work of Baptizing, as an inferiour Part of his Office, to others, and thanks God he had Baptized very few among the Corinthians, Lest any should say he had Baptized in his own Name; that is, lest any should say he was setting up a little Faction or Party of his own, and debasing the Institution of Christ (as we see Men do) to advance it. He tells us expressly: *Christ sent him not to Baptize, but to Preach the Gospel*, i. e. He sent him not so much to Baptize as to Preach. This was his chief Work, and therefore he applied himself most industriously to it. A very different Temper certainly his was from what appears in some Men, who, were it not for us, and to prevent their Peoples coming after us, would not care how little they preach'd the Gospel; but as for Baptizing, Oh! by all Means, they would engross it to themselves, and rather than fail, they will do it where 'tis wholly needless, having been done before, and so they make Christ's Ordinance serve to lift Men into and promote the little Interest of their own Sect. So ambitious are they of doing that, of the Design of which this Apostle could not imagine himself suspected without the utmost Indignation and Abhorrence. But I must do this Angry Generation (who have lately begun this Practice) the Justice, as to own they now begin to treat both Sacraments impartially and with equal Reverence; for the other Sacrament has been vilely prostituted by them for a long Time. But let us, my Brethren, follow the

1 Cor. i. 15.

V. 17.

the example of this Blessed Apostle, and lay out our Care, in the first place, upon the great and essential Matters of our Holy Religion. Let us *preach Christ, the Hope of Glory, warning every Man,* ^{1 Col. i.} *and teaching every Man in all Wisdom, that we may* ^{27, 28, 29.} *present every Man perfect in Christ Jesus: Herein also let us labour, striving according to his Working in us.* Let us earnestly endeavour to convert Sinners from the Error of their Ways, and to confirm, establish and improve the Saints. And in Order hereunto, let us fervently implore the Aids of the Divine Spirit, who alone can crown our Labours with Success, and so *write the Laws of Christ upon the fleshy Tables of our Hearers Hearts,* as that they may evidently appear to be the *Epistle of Christ* in our Behalf. If we can obtain many such *Credentials*, we may patiently bear the Insults of our Adversaries, and rest satisfied in the Evidence we have, that our Ministry is acceptable to God.

3. AND now, in the last Place, let me apply what has been said to you, who are our *Beloved Charge*. You see, my Brethren, *what Trust, what* ^{2 Cor. iii. 4.} *Confidence we have through Christ to Godward concerning you.* We can boast of many of you. Would to God we could say so of you all. We are griev'd, when we perceive that we labour in vain as to any of you. We earnestly long, and *travail as it* ^{Gal. iv. 19.} *were in Birth, until we see Christ formed in you.* And as *Workers together with God, we beseech you* ^{2 Cor. vi. 1.} *also, that ye receive not the Grace of God in vain.* We warn you, that you delude not your selves with a formal Profession; that you think not an ordinary Attendance on our Ministrations is all you should look after. Our Instructions will do you no good, if you will not by your selves seriously

ously consider them, and turn them into unfortunate Petitions. Pray then, for the sanctifying Operations of God's Spirit, that he may *write the Laws of Christ in your Hearts*. Then shall you be *the Epistle of Christ*, which we shall have Reason to bless God for. We doubt not God has already
 2 Cor. ix. 13 done this in many of you, and we *glorify God for your professed Subjection to the Gospel of Christ*. But
 2 Cor. xiii. 9. this *we wish, even your Perfection*. We claim no Authority, we desire no Respect, but for your Benefit, which we would gladly adapt all our
 2 Cor. xii. 19. Ministrations to ; being earnestly desirous to do all *Things, dearly beloved, for your edifying*. And therefore *this we beseech you, Brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us Scripture-Directions, how ye ought to walk, and to please God, so ye would abound more and more*. We cannot be in any Pain as to your Opinion of us ; for however we should not be Ministers in the Esteem of others, who avoid us, and condemn us, without knowing us, yet our Ministry will be indisputable with you, who are *our Work, and the Seal of our Ministry in the Lord*. If we may find our Ministry successful upon you, to increase all the Graces of God's Spirit in you, we shall think we approve our selves the Ministers of Christ, and shall be easy and patient under the Censures and Reproaches of unreasonable Men.

LET me now therefore beseech, nay, require you all by the Respect you profess to have for us, that you make your *Profiting appear to all Men*. Your other Respect, whatever it be, will not satisfy us without this : *for we seek not yours but you*. By this you will secure your own Reputation as Christians, and ours as the Ministers of Christ among you. We fear not the *Sophistry* of
 2 Cor. xii. 14. our

our Adversaries, which we have easily detected; May we but see our selves more secur'd with Arguments from your Conduct. Upon you therefore, dearly Beloved, we leave the Honour and Reputation of our despised Ministry. See that you fairly and fully vindicate it, by demonstrating the Usefulness of it, in the Sobriety, Righteousness, and Godliness of your Lives and Conversations. You know that well-doing is prescrib'd as the ready Way to put to Silence the Ignorance of foolish Men: and no doubt it will stop the Mouths of Gainsayers, or make them appear foolish and extravagant in their Opposition. See then that you all walk circumspectly, not as Fools but as Wise. Exercise your selves herein daily, to keep Consciences void of Offence toward God and toward Men. Work out your Salvation with Fear and Trembling. And giving all Diligence, add to your Faith, Virtue, and to Virtue, Knowledge; and to Knowledge, Temperance; and to Temperance, Patience; and to Patience, Godliness; and to Godliness, Brotherly Kindness; and to Brotherly Kindness, Charity. For if these Things are in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren, nor unfruitful in the Knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. — And if ye do these Things ye shall never fall: for so an Entrance shall be ministred unto you abundantly, into the Everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. And then neither your not having Episcopal Baptism, nor your failing at your Graves of having the kind and charitable Words said over you, which use to be said over Swearers, Drunkards, Whoremongers and Thieves, shall be able to keep you out from thence.

THESE therefore are the Things we intreat you to mind for your own sake, and for ours;

F

and

An Useful Ministry, &c.

and in these accomplish'd in you, we desire to
rejoice both now, and in the Great Day. For
what is our Hope, or Joy, or Crown of Rejoicing?
Are not ye even in the Presence of our Lord Jesus
Christ at his Coming? For ye are our Glory and
Joy.

F I N I S

ERRATA.

Page 6. line 27. for clearest r. dearest. P. 15.
l. ult. dele? P. 29. l. 30. r. ordinarily to be
ac. P. 30. l. 1. for Debauchers r. Debauchers.